

The hate is strong with this one...

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.



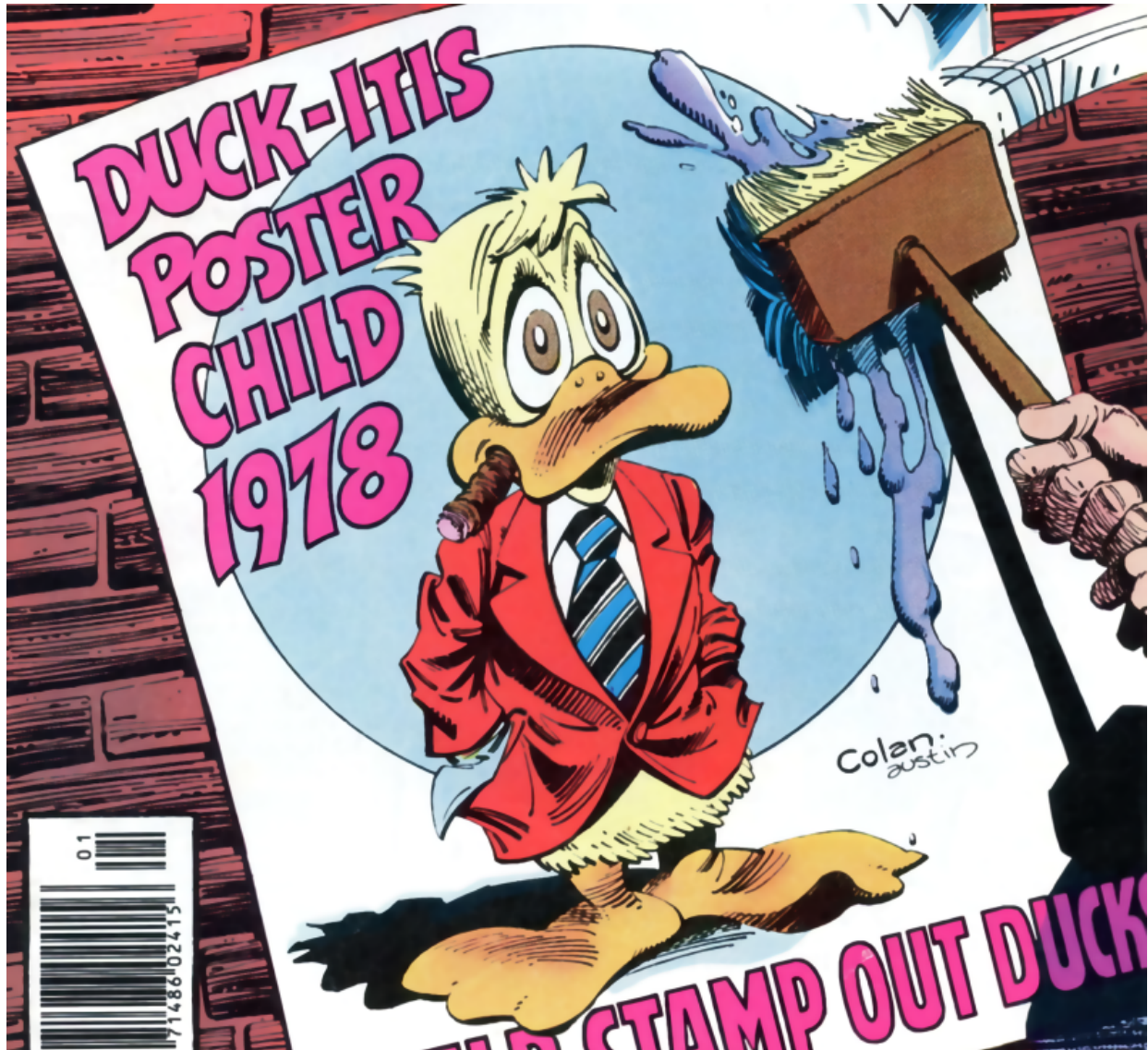
Before Donk there was a trouserless anthropomorphic feathered superhero... who just so happened to be a duck. His name was Howard, HOWARD THE DUCK written in massive bold uppercase letters chiselled from a looming slab of immovable granite. Because this was a major *phenomenon*, the like of which you'd never seen before, or likely would ever see again in your lifetime.

For nostalgic scene-setting purposes, it's 1986 and president of Lucasfilm, George Lucas, has just been struck by an alien

meteorite, rendering him incapable of making rational decisions. Thus he steps down from his illustrious post to become the executive producer in charge of translating Marvel's comic book waterfowl hero to the silver screen. Howard - the pint-sized eight dwarves/kids in a costume as we know him - is hatched. Curiously the movie was kind of reverse-ported back to the comic book scene, appearing in Marvel Super Special #41.



You may have clocked that following a legal preduckament with Disney concerning the potential infringement of their Donald the Duck IP, he is now wearing pants and has undergone a nip and duck. Well, technically he *had* been censored for six years by this stage. Prior to that Howard had been brazenly flashing the comic book reading public for seven years.



(Howard is being strip-searched)

Howard: On my planet, we never say die, we say... NOT MY SHORTS! You perverts!

I mention it mostly because it's the law. At least an official ducktom. If you're going to write or talk about Howard (and *everyone* has at some point) you're duty-bound to tick off certain key points. Primarily that means duck boobs, Playduck, creepy innuendo, bestiality, the Wilhelm scream, and of course, pants.



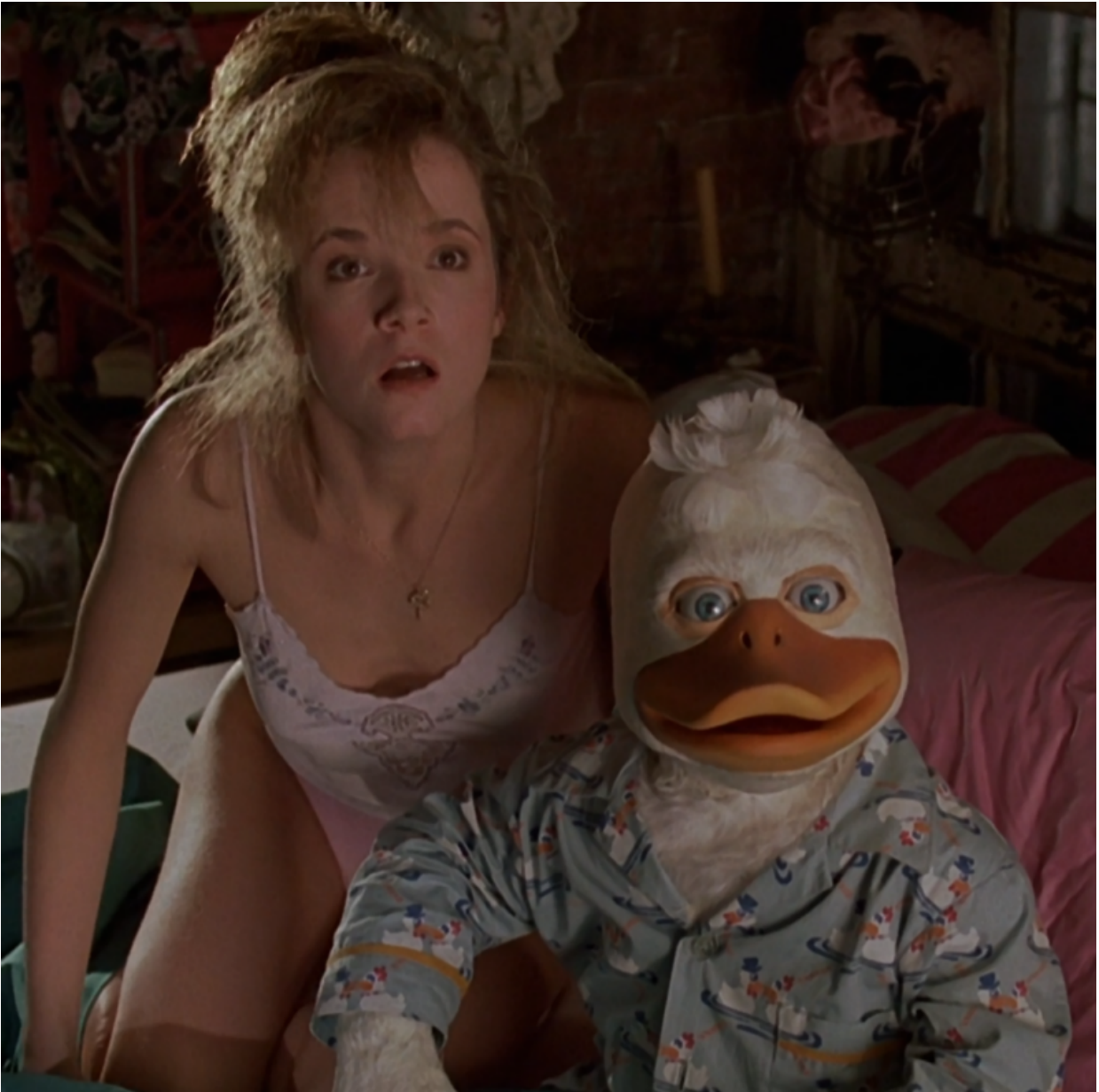
Beverly: I just can't seem to find the right man.

Howard T. Duck: Maybe it's not a man you should be looking for.

Beverly: Ah, you think I might find happiness in the animal kingdom, Duckie?

Howard T. Duck: Like they say, Doll, love's strange. We could always give it a try.

Beverly: Okay, let's go for it, Mr Macho.



None of this would be an issue had Howard been targeted purely towards adults, inspired by the 'existential satire' the

comic purports to be. Instead what transpired was a childish slapstick romp starring a talking duck from space who suffers from the pun-spouting equivalent of Tourette's syndrome. Who thinks puns are funny anyway? They're the lowest form of...

...HYPOCRITE!

Who said that?

Skinhead: (notices Howard) I've been doing too much toot!

A PG-rated movie laced with sexually-oriented adult jokes that are too puerile for adults to appreciate, and too adult for kids to digest. Satan's Sluts? A duck condom? Were we supposed to be learning the birds and the bees from an overgrown puppet?

With its paper-thin plot, terrible dialogue and excruciating human-duck romantic liaisons Howard the Duck is one of the oddest Hollywood propositions to ever get the green light.



Howard: I've given up trying to assimilate. I've got to get back to my own kind!

(notices Beverly's behind as he watches her crawl across the top of her bed in her underwear)

Howard: Althoooooough... I HAVE developed a greater appreciation for the female version of the human anatomy... ARROOOOO!

Beverly: Howard, you really are the worst!

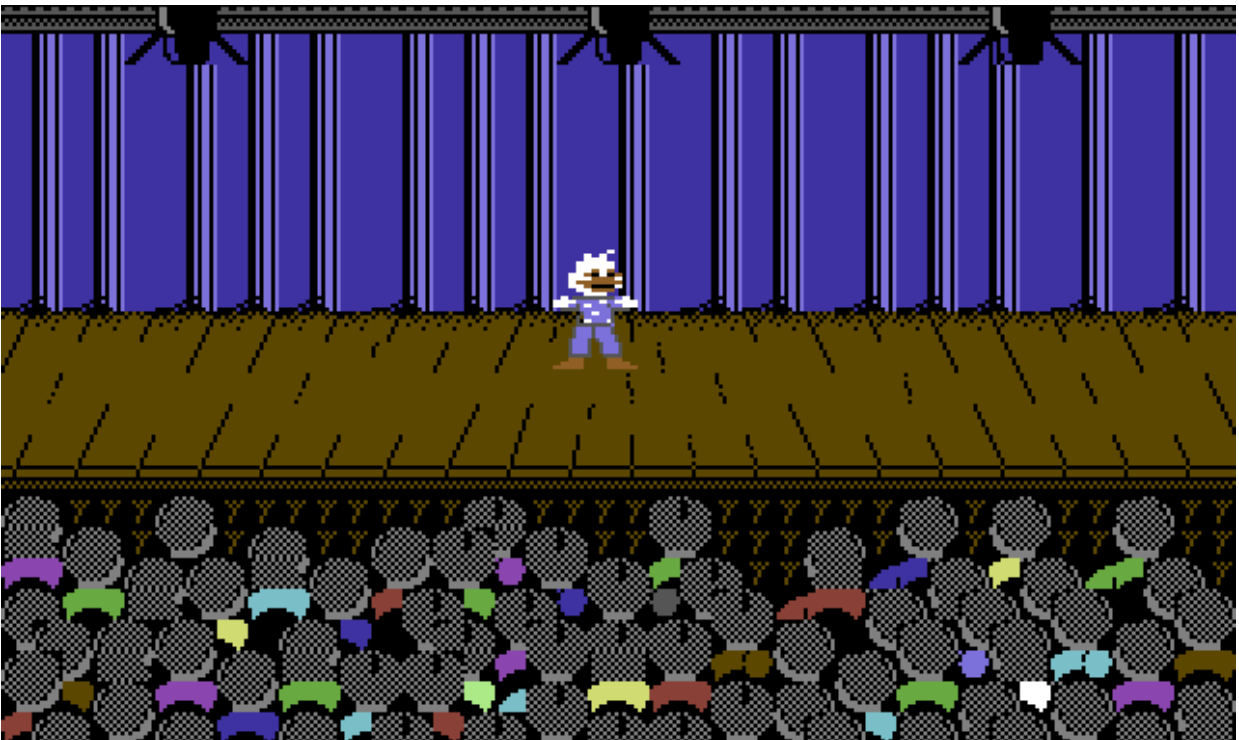
Howard: He-he!

Beverly: Come on, let's watch David Letterman. Come on!

(Pats the bed)

Howard T. Duck: Okie-dookie.

What no-one seems to acknowledge is the *heavy* Back to the Future Johnny B. Goode style musical parody performance that rolls into the credits.



Beverly: You play pretty good.

Howard: I had a group in high school: Howard and the Heartbreakers.

Beverly: Oh, heavy, Howard. Very heavy. Maybe you should be our manager. Wait a second. Maybe you're just the kind of bizarro influence we need!



Despite the time-travelling sci-fi comedy being at the forefront of our minds at all times; Howard's co-star and sort-of love interest is played by the extremely seductive Lea Thompson, Marty's mum. Chosen over Tori Amos who also auditioned for the role of Beverly. As did Phoebe Cates. Lea, flirting with her own son the previous year, we know her track record with relationship choices isn't stellar. Maybe that's the gag. If so, it's the best one in the movie! Would *you* want to take him under your wing?



Beverly: Put him down! Howard may be a duck, but you people are animals! He's my boyfriend!

3rd Trucker: That's disgusting!

Beverly: You don't make me proud to be a human!

If you remember anything at all about Marvel's first superhero movie it's likely to be that it was a bit of a turkey - well you know what I mean - at the box office. Howard, the absurd film-noir live-action interpretation of Steve Gerber's 1973 irascible quacker cost \$37 million to produce, returning a less than staggering \$38 million worldwide. Lucas hoped it would bankroll his recently constructed \$50m Skywalker Ranch. Whoops.

Beverly: I don't know where you are now, but I hope you're happier there. This world didn't treat you very good, but you saved it, didn't you?

It wasn't just the public who flocked away from the cinema, it ruffled the critics' feathers too. They nominated Howard for *seven* Razzie Awards, of which it waddled away with four. Naturally, the proposed sequel failed to incubate.

Dr Jennings: You are about to make history a second time, my little friend.

Howard: Thanks. But once was plenty.

Nominated for...

Worst Director (Willard Huyck)

Worst Original Song ('Howard the Duck'). Fair enough, it mostly consists of repeating the name of the movie, over-emphasising the word 'the'. Somehow annoyingly catchy though all the same.

Phil Blumburtt: Me Phil. You Howard. We be friends.

Worst Supporting Actor (Tim Robbins). It's a comedy, he delivered an over-the-top, goofy, zany performance. Give him a break. We all know he's a venerated pro because we've seen *Shawshank Redemption*. He didn't have the best script to showcase his talents in *Howard the Duck*!



Winner in the category of...

Worst New Star ("the six guys and gals in the duck suit"). I thought it was *eight*? And they did what was required in a convincing enough way. None of them provided Howard's

voice, that was Jerome Herbert 'Chip' Zien. John Cusack and Martin Short also auditioned.



Worst Visual Effects. Really? By 1986 standards I thought they were one of the few highlights. ILM were responsible - post-Star Wars the special effects were never going to be terrible. Acknowledging the pop-culture influence of Star Wars, a kid in the diner scene can be spotted wearing an Empire Strikes Back t-shirt. Another wears one commemorating Return of the Jedi.

Worst Screenplay. Absolutely!

Worst Picture (tied with *Under the Cherry Moon*). It would be hard to argue with that decision!

Howard is a bizarre creation in whichever incarnation we encounter him. His name alone makes little sense. Emanating from Duckworld, the entire population is comprised of ducks so why he would be designated as 'the duck' is anyone's guess. Are all his family, neighbours and friends called 'Whatever the duck' too? To be fair to Steve Gerber, his original concept never referred to Duckworld, that was a token effort towards filling in the blanks in Howard's prologue tacked on later by other writers.

Dr Jennings: In the lab that night, we saw a single feather fall. We weren't aware that the rest of you, Howard, had landed in that alley just two miles away. Any questions?

Howard: Yeah. Where are my pants?

In both the comic and movie he finds himself "Trapped In a World He Never Made!". *Earth* that is, arriving in our neck of the universe purely by accident.



Dr Jennings: It was just a routine procedure, meant to measure the density of the gases that surround Alpha Centauri. However, partway through the experiment, there was a deviation, and, uh... we lost control of the laser spectroscope.

Howard: What do you mean, "lost control"?

Dr Jennings: Some unknown force was redirecting the laser beam from its original target, so that it hit your planet instead.

Howard: Hit my planet? How about 'hit my living room'? Talk about an invasion of privacy!



Eventually capitulating to his unlikely circumstances Howard is obliged to adapt to hairless ape's ludicrous rituals and discriminatory tendencies in order to blend in long enough to find a way to return home. Not unlike a certain stunted extra terrestrial often spotted riding shotgun in BMX handlebar baskets.

Howard: I can't believe this planet. Fried eggs - yuck!

What I don't quite follow is why the emphasis is on not inventing the planet on which he lives. Who *does*? Although I can only speak for humans, whether we believe in

creationism or evolution we tend to accept that the earth was around for a while before we showed up.

Howard: Hey, if I had some place to go I certainly wouldn't be in Cleve-Land.

In the movie, this 'duck out of water' principle lands Howard in Cleveland, Ohio, following a rift in the 'cosmic axis' caused by a botched experiment with a laser spectroscope. In the process a nefarious Dark Overlord is summoned who quickly sets about devising a scheme to rid the earth of humans, supplanting them with his own species. Judging by Howard's finale encounter this is a breed of humongous shrimp-like monsters capable of shape-shifting into human hosts for covert integration reasons.





Dr Jennings: It feels like something inside me, gnawing at my guts... what's wrong with me?

Beverly: Well... what did you have for lunch?



In the comics, he was known as 'Thog the Nether-Spawn, Overmaster of Sominus' in case you ever want to look him up in the phone book. For most of the movie, we equate the Dark Overlord with Dr Walter Jennings (played by future sex offender, Jeffrey Jones) who serves as his conduit. You can see why; Industrial Light and Magic special effects weren't cheap or easy to pull off in 1986 so the showstopper was reserved for the final act. Impressive it is too, notwithstanding the lack of colour correction, leading us to believe that the Dark

Overlord is occupying another plane of existence. Howard's (\$2m!) animatronic head was also considered state of the art for the time, so we can at least appreciate the movie for its technical achievements if nothing else.

Howard: If you got blasted millions of miles through space, ended up on another planet and were given an IQ test by a janitor you'd be a little pissed off too.

Howard: No duck is an island. And if fate sent me here to save Earth, then Howard the Duck is ready to fight!



Reluctantly at first, our jaded, cynical, cigar-smoking hero, Howard, steps up to the plate to quash the Dark Overlord's machinations. In the meantime, he befalls all manner of hilarious calamities... because someone, somewhere may well

find it funny. And if they *do* alarms will be raised, with those concerned rounded up and shot to cleanse the gene pool for the sake of the human species' survival. Calamities such as ending up working in a sauna/brothel, and piloting a Quicksilver MX ultralight at *very low altitude* over Ohio to evade apprehension by the police (and allow the producers to introduce a dramatic, exhilarating, entirely unnecessary never-ending chase sequence). His crime you might wonder?

Lieutenant Welker: You are gonna go play sitting duck in a jail cell.

Officer Hanson: Lieutenant - what's the charge, sir?

Lieutenant Welker: Illegal alien!



Perfect computer game fodder you might imagine, and you'd be right. A powered hand-glider features in Activision's Commodore 64, MSX, Apple II, Spectrum and Amstrad bird's eye view explorey beat 'em up action... morsel? Make the

most of it if you're a fan (tee-hee) of the movie... very little of the source material was transposed. Without feather ado, let's take a sneak beak... or if you like, just skip to the bottom line courtesy of Zzap or Commodore Format.



"This is very good visually and aurally, and the initial impressions generated are quite good. Once it's played though, you soon realise that apple has a rotten core. The

gameplay is limited, slow and very frustrating with four very limited stages to complete, and none of them are anything to thrill. The whole package is a complete waste of time. Where's the old magic, Activision?

There's only one good thing about this game - and that's Howard's superb animation. Otherwise this is an extremely dull exploration game. The fighting is very tedious, but more annoying is the fact that Howard can't walk 'behind' trees - he has to walk around them. It's also slow to play, even on higher skill levels, and I became incredibly frustrated when I couldn't shake loose a gang of mutants - you don't get a chance.

Controlling the microlite in the second stage is also very frustrating, and so is traversing the cave in the volcano. Overall, Howard the Duck looks pretty, but it's incredibly dull and frustrating to play.

I found Howard the Duck quite absorbing - for ten minutes anyway. The pace is far too slow, and fighting mutants is tedious with such a limited number of moves available. Flying the microlite is incredibly frustrating, and after playing for an hour or so I came away feeling irritated, disgusted and somewhat cheated by the whole thing. Why this is multi-load I don't know - there's just so little to it. Activision ought to give up producing poor quality licensed games and continue from where they left off... writing original, quality products like Park Patrol."

"Another licensing disaster which should be avoided."

Zzap (19%, C64 version, February 1987)



"Quack. Remember Howard? He was an over-weight, crazy kind of duckling headed for a life of stardom except for the fact that the movie eventually flopped. Activision's licensed version was just as successful. Four levels of feathery multiloop came up trumps with badly drawn slime, a bunch of invincible villains and flight training so exciting it made you want to kick your monitor in. If you see anyone who tells you this game is fun, avoid them - they're quackers."

Commodore Format (March 1991, 'A-Z of classic games' article)

Oddly this also features titles CF consider awful, Howard being a prime example. Interesting too that they use the phrase "came up trumps" to mean that something went awry with the development. Before Donald's rise to power this traditionally signalled a positive or successful outcome, so maybe the author, Gordon Houghton, was playing on the other connotations of the word.



While Beverly, 'Philsy' (Tim Robbins) and the Dark Overlord are name-checked in the plot, they barely make an impact on the game itself. Our friends serve as unseen damsels in distress ab-duck-ted by supreme nemesis, the Dark Overlord, the latter naturally making an appearance for the finale, though not beforehand.





It's not such a big deal since the movie has a tiny cast of core characters too, and the only one replicated from the Marvel comics mythos is Beverly Switzer. Even then the video store clerk was turned into a rock singer. She's the only aspect of the movie that makes it worth a look. Kind of a big-hearted girl next door type, yet with enough spark to make her interesting. She also sings all her own songs without dubbing and does a fine job. Obviously she's pretty too, and still looks glamorous today.



As the title suggests the game's setting is Hawaii, the premise revolving around rescuing our friends from an active volcano from which the Dark Overlord sources his power. Whilst Hawaii doesn't play a role in the movie a little bird told me that writers/producers Willard Hyuck and Gloria Katz intended for it to be shot in the paradise hotspot, mostly because it would be the ideal holiday destination.



It's not clear how the volcano would have factored in, except that Hawaii exists as a result of volcanic activity so for them to make an appearance wouldn't be beyond the realms of believability. Similarly volcanic, the tropical island of Quackatoa was also bandied about as a possibility. Then dropped, likely because it was considered too eggstravagant.

Maybe the manual or 'rescuer's handbook' can shed some light on the situation...

"Where'd everybody go?

They were right here a minute ago. Beverly. And Phil. You were all dancing, yeah, that's it. Dancing... to the radical sounds of the Cherry Bombs (Beverly's band if you haven't seen the movie).

But now everybody's gone. And you, Howard. Where are you? Why is it you seem to have floated down to some volcanic island somewhere in the middle of nowhere? Or everywhere?

It's all starting to make sense... your best friend's gone... volcano Island... the Dark Overlord!

That's it! The Dark Overlord has kidnapped Beverly and Phil and brought them to this volcanic island. 'Cause he's hooked on thermal energy - needs to tap into it constantly to maintain his power.

You know that he knows that you're the only one who can foil his plans to take over the earth. But he thinks he can turn you into duck soup - to make the world his oyster.

What he doesn't know is that you're a Quack Fu Master, an avid Ultralight flyer, and a whiz with a Neutron Disintegrator.

So take him up on his challenge. And show the Dark Overlord that his treacherous plan isn't all it's quacked up to be."



Well, that's kind of the gist of the movie too; the Dark Overlord intends to dominate the earth by opening the floodgates to his species, the responsibility to foil his plans resting upon Howard's bill. At an hour and fifty minutes long it feels like War and Peace, while the game only allocates thirty minutes to get the job done. Thirty very long *fake* minutes given the unresponsive, broken controls we have to work with. I say 'fake' because they tick down at about three times the normal rate.

Part of the difficulty is that lumbered with a single fire button, it's designed to be context-sensitive. Fire thereby serves as the jump function as the situation demands, as well as to Quack-Fu kick and punch our opponents into oblivion. These all turn out to be bald Draculas known only as 'mutants' who emerge incessantly from molehills, until we trample them down to size, somehow sealing them shut.

Howard: No one laughs at a master of Quack- Fu!

Those that escaped beforehand must first be disoriented with the first blow, then hit again to dispatch them permanently. Should we raise the difficulty setting from the outset the enemies recover from their stupor more rapidly, and attack us with greater ferocity, requiring more hits before they shuffle off their mortal coil.

Howard: That's it, no more Mr Nice Duck.



Kicking is our main form of attack, executed by holding fire and pushing in the required direction. Punching is instead used to dislodge mutants who have latched onto Howard facehugger style. This move is triggered by first pushing in the required direction then pressing fire. It sounds simple, yet in practice, it's easy to mix up the functions and end up dead. If too many mutants latch onto Howard he's thrown off the island and we fail our mission.

Four degrees of difficulty are optional - novice, intermediate, advanced, and expert - each adjusting factors such as the allocation of lives, duration of levels and what we have to

accomplish within them. Howard's four stages are essentially *one* not particularly long level truncated at several junctures. Level one is cut short sooner than level two, two ends abruptly sooner than three, and so on. It's all a bit of a swizz.



First and foremost we need to track down our backpack that was cast astray when parachuting onto the island. In one fowl swoop, this will equip us with a solar-powered jetpack, portable neutron disintegrator, and ultralight so is essential to completing the game. Our jetpack allows Howard to float across water channels, the neutron disintegrator comes into play when bringing about the downfowl of the Dark Overlord, while a flight of fancy in the ultralight will migrate us to his volcano lair.

Howard: We've got a saying on my planet. If God intended us to fly, he wouldn't have taken away our wings.

This first 'challenge' is all a bit Where's Waldo? ...if Waldo happened to be sitting on our chest wearing an oversized birthday badge reading "hi, I'm Waldo". Nip round the first bend and there's the backpack. We can't leave this tiny confined area without it so it's hard to fail to make the connection.

Phil Blumburt: Howard, in prehistoric times you flew. Fly, Howard! Find your instincts, trust your birdness, FLY!



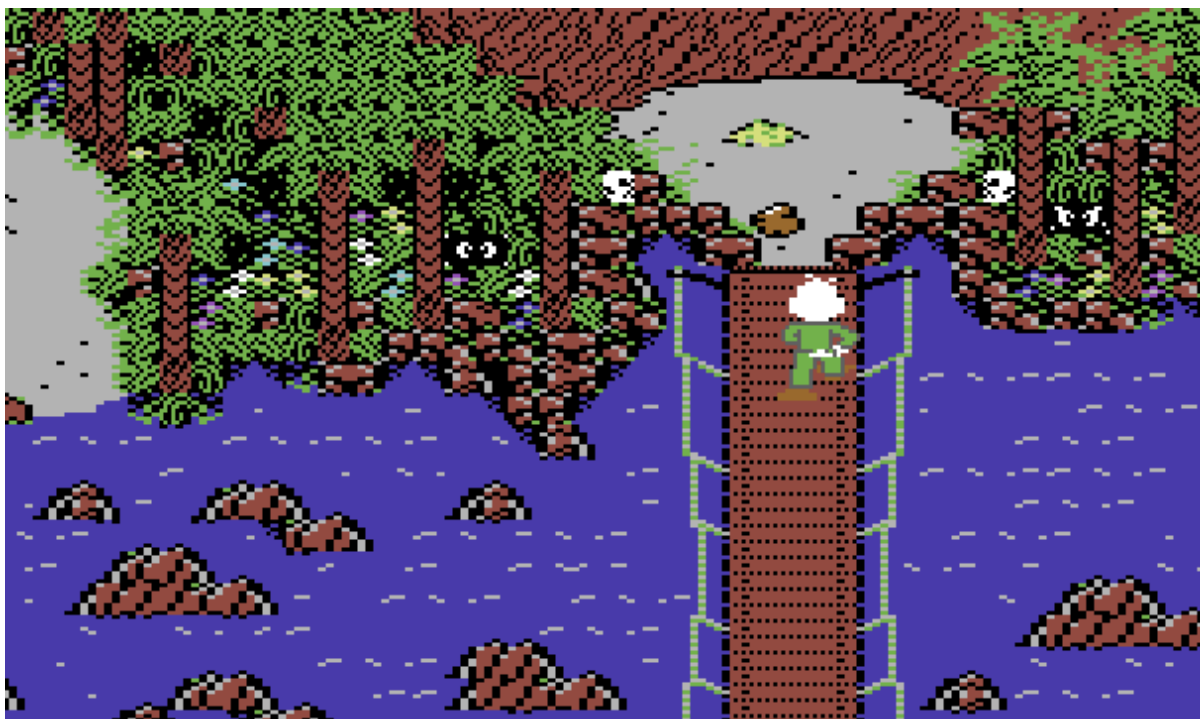
With the backpack in our possession, reach the edge of the shore and mash the fire button to open the jetpack's throttle and scoot across. Free as a bird! We're a sitting duck otherwise. Hey, I bet no-one has ever thought to use fresh imaginative duck puns in an article about ducks before. I'm going to keep this up! It's a bit late to stop now in any case.

Once grounded we learn that certain jumps demand a run-up. To clear expansive slime puddles for instance. Sometimes Howard will respond by actually leaping when you instruct

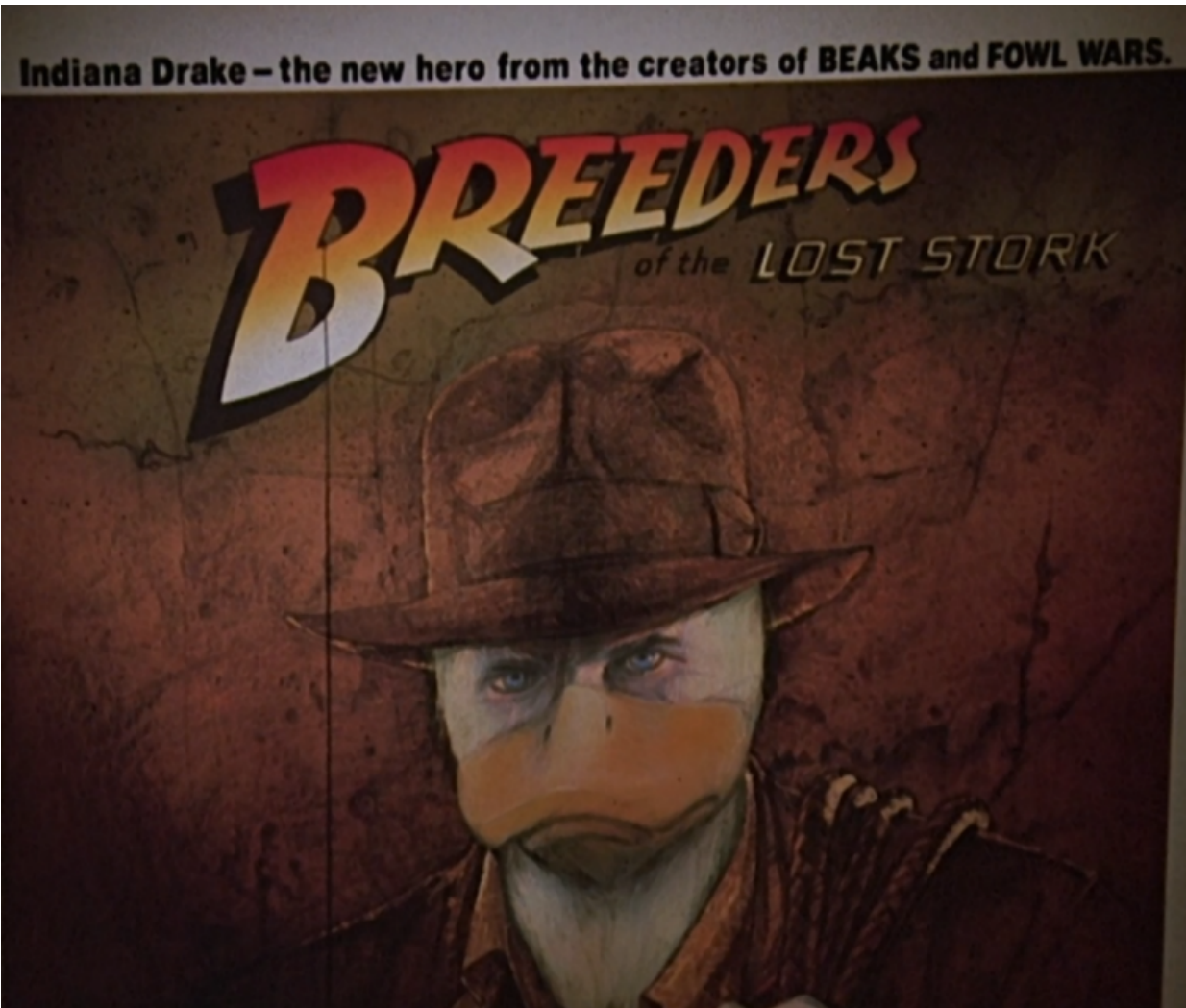
him to. Mostly though the moody alien will do whatever the shell he feels like. I've told the ruddy mallard to duck his ideas up countless times, but it's water off... what's the phrase? Just like in the movie he's one independent, freethinking dude. Although I doubt that's what the developers were aiming to mimeograph, Howard is just a broken bird-brain of a game that will test your patience more than joystick skills.



Often Howard will even get stuck on nothing at all at a critical moment and we'll end up as the key ingredient in a meaty recipe through no fault of our own. When trying to cross the Indiana Jones-style rope bridge for example. Gingerly edging towards the opposite cliff, the trick is to dodge left and right to sidestep any approaching rock projectiles hurled by the awaiting mutants. A task which *should* be child's play.



Nice that it exists all the same given the blatant hat-tips towards Indy in the movie. You can't miss the 'Breeder of the Lost Stork' poster. Also, a Temple of Doom t-shirt is worn by the sushi restaurant cook. It makes sense since Gloria Katz and her husband, Willard Huyck, co-wrote the screenplay for Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom. I believe George Lucas also has a connection of some kind to the Indiana Jones franchise. ;)



"Blast out of this ready-to-pop stand."

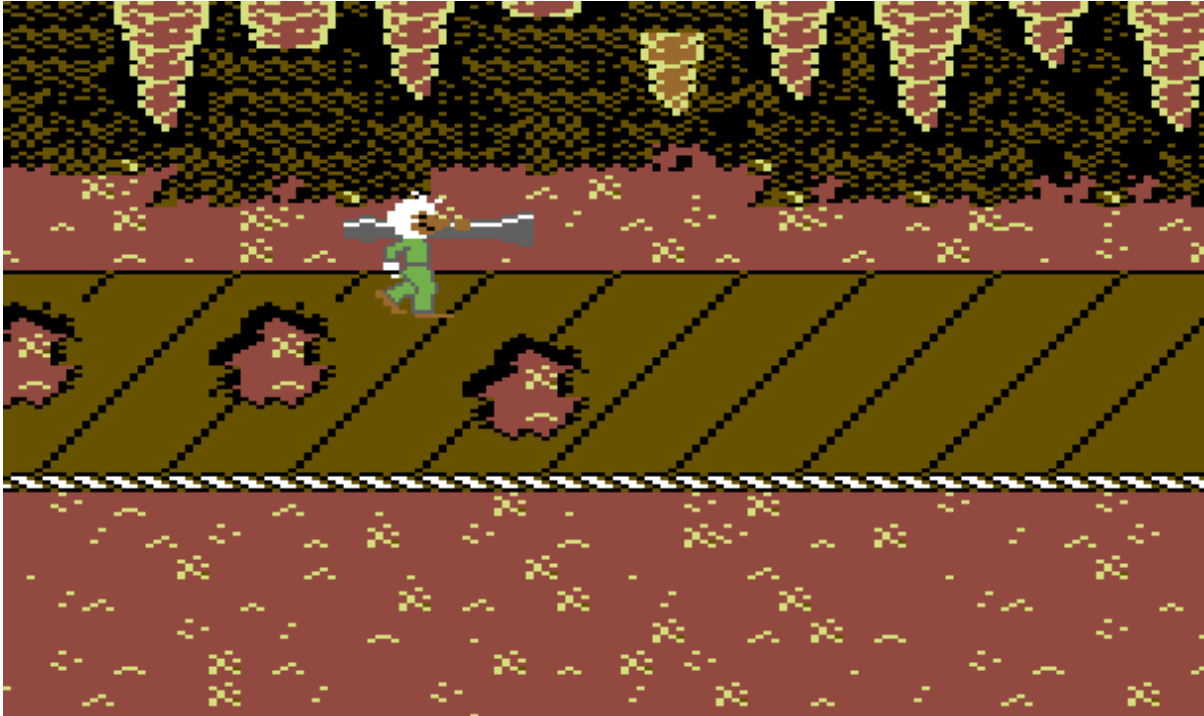
I have no idea what that means, but since this is what it says we must do in the manual it would be wise to take heed. The movie is brimming with jokes that are more likely to be met with sad trombones rather than laughs so it's appropriate that Activision set out to continue the trend.

Arriving on the main body of the island after a short powered flight (Howard can't fly or swim under his own steam remember!) our core aim is to reach the volcano, find the ultralight and fly it over the entrance. Contending with thermal riptides (or crosswinds) we must then parachute

inside to confront the Dark Overlord, who if he has any sense will be busy toasting marshmallows over the lava pit. When airborne we can pull back to ascend and push forwards to dive, whilst using the left and right directions to steer.

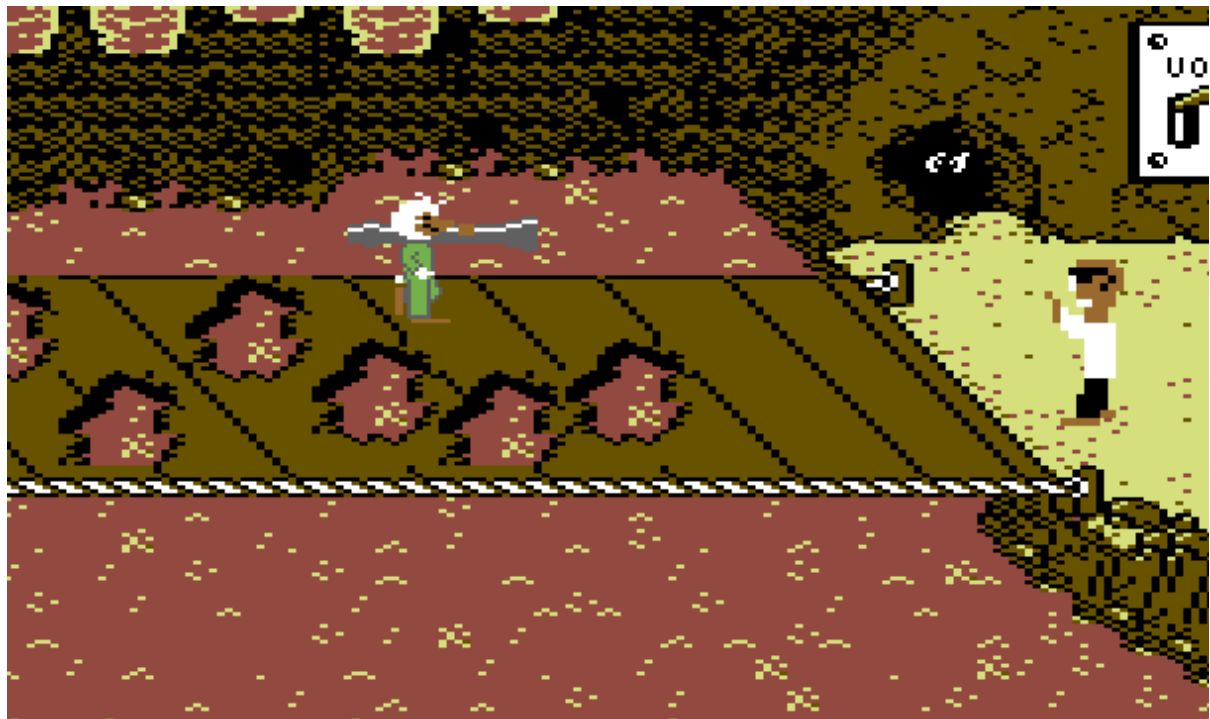


Extending the exercise by a few extra minutes our bete noire can be found lurking at the end of a cave rigged with falling stalactites. As these detach they rip gaping holes in the bridge we must cross, forcing us to backtrack and perambulate around them. Take too long and the entire width of the bridge is eviscerated making the task impossible. Expect to lose most or all of your lives at this point, largely due to dodgy collision detection. The key to solving this bit is to keep our left foot on the ledge as we navigate around the holes to avoiding teetering over the edge of the bridge or 'hitting' a hole. Falling isn't animated you see.

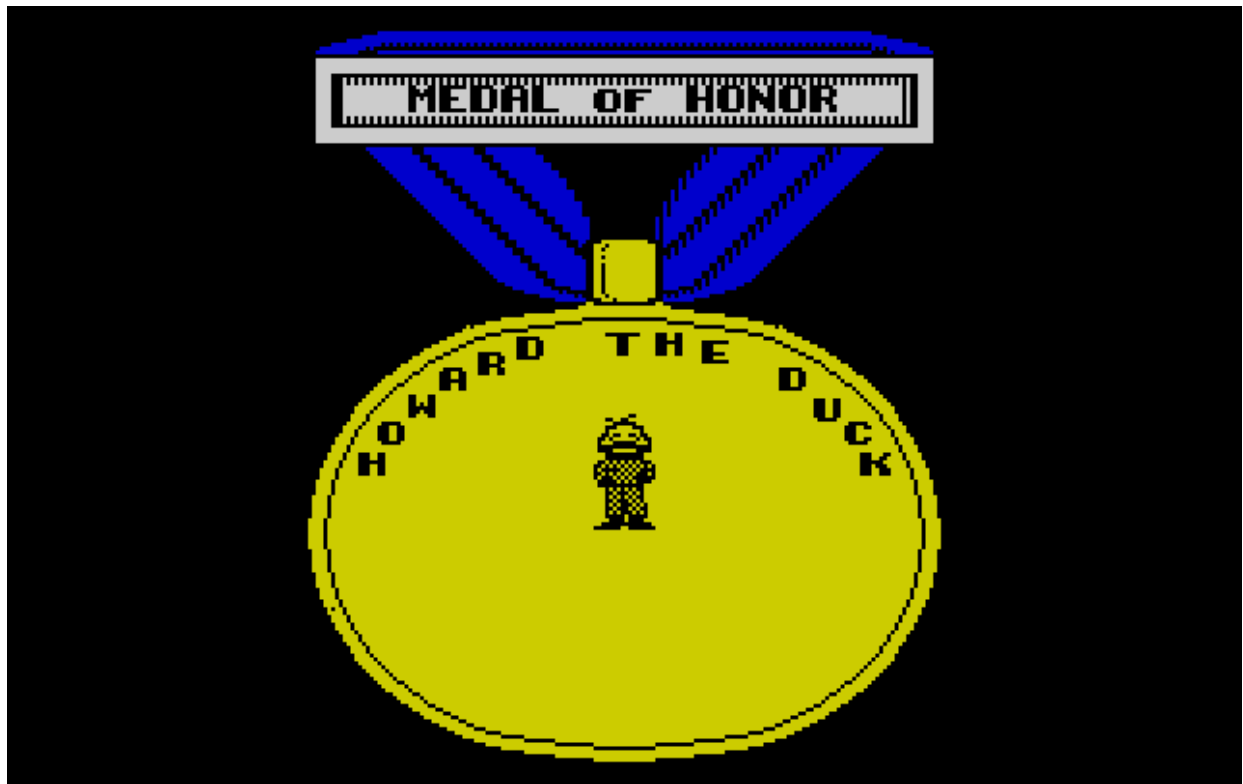


Shimmy around the recesses ducking and diving energy bolt projectiles and we'll meet his royal Darkness himself. To defeat him he must be shot three times with the neutraliser Neutron pistol, changing colour with each hit to indicate how well we're doing. Then it's time to shut down the volcano with the big light switch, as you do. Aren't modern conveniences wonderful?

Howard: Not bad for a duck from outer space.







Our reward is a medal. Huh? I thought we were here to save the earth from being subjugated by alien shrimps as in the movie? Well, technically the Dark Overlord is just some scientist in a white lab coat in the game. I suppose a representation of Dr Walter Jennings to tie in with the movie.



Oh yeah, Philsy and Beverly. What happened to them? These 8-bit computers weren't the only things with memory limitations.



Nevermind, duck soup is off the menu and that's what counts. Howard gets to quack another day. Never in *gaming* form, though he *has* appeared in various cameo roles in other Marvel franchises over the years. Guardians of the Galaxy (2014) for instance. Supervillain Dark Overlord went on to become 'Mikey' in Men in Black's opening scene in 1997.

It's hard to decide which is more tedious to endure, the movie or the game. What I *will* say for the game is that it amounts to about a tenth of the running time so that's a major feather in its cap.

Howard: (to Beverly) Of all the alleys in the world I could have fallen into that night, why did it have to be yours?



It also drops most of the hokey dialogue and all of Howard's squirmy-awkward innuendo, leaving just the odd snarky comment relayed via speech bubbles, so that's a blessing. Try to cross the water without the (C64) jetpack and we're helpfully informed, "I can't swim Einstein!" (the Einstein is dropped for the Spectrum version). It *is* animated, therefore literally poultry in motion. So there's that.

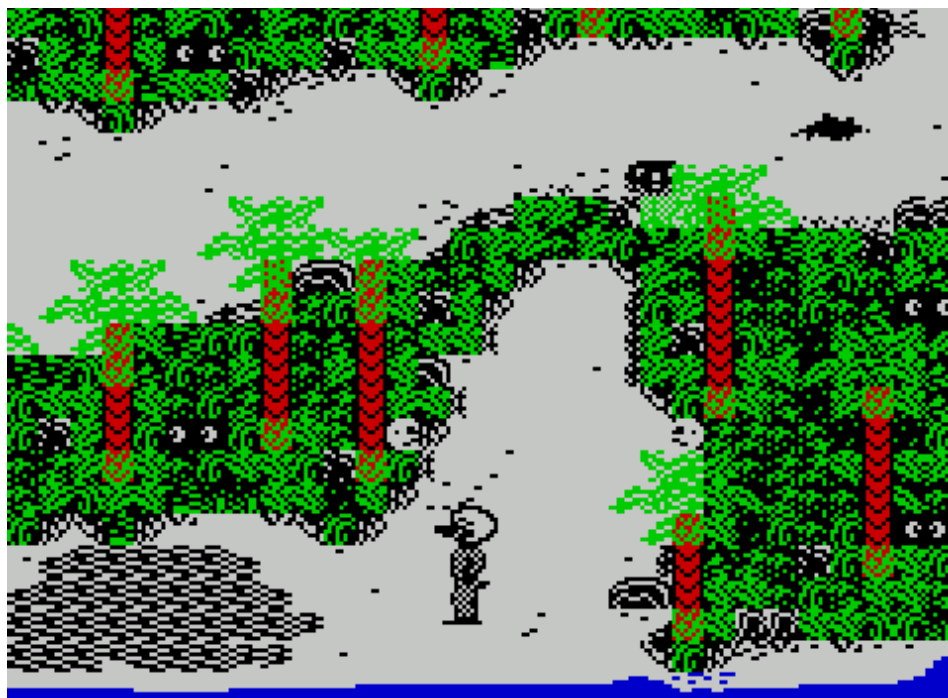


Wendy: (Message left on answering machine) Hi. It's Wendy. I had this really intense dream last night, Howie. I was running my fingers through your feathers and all of the sudden, oh, well, you better come over tonight and I'll show you what really happened next. Ciao for now, Howie.

Beverly: (to Howard as they lie in bed together) I just can't resist your intense animal magnetism.

(the feathers on the top of Howard's head stick straight up)





Alternative Software who published the game in the UK (sticking a Gremlin on the cover of the Spectrum box?) charged £9.99 for the tape-based edition and an extra fiver if you fancied it on disk. A plucky full-fledged premium purchase for an 8-bit title! A duckadent splash-out in fact for a cash-strapped kid, especially since it waddles like a budget release, quacks like a budget release... you get the gist. I'm sure most people saved their pennies, snagging the quacked piratey version instead, pecking away at Alternative's nest egg.

"The cute waddle that gives your hero his immediate appeal soon becomes tiresome, and the fighting sequences were not varied or fast enough to keep me involved. For the younger player, I cannot recommend Howard highly enough but I fear the seasoned gamerster will play it twice and never return again."

Computer Gamer (55%, C64 version, February 1987)



Still, the lame-duck must have sold reasonably well as Alternative saw fit to republish the poultry four-level adaptation in 1991 as a quarter of their 'Most Cute' collection. A set co-starring Danger Mouse in Double Trouble, Punch & Judy and Star Paws. Star Paws? That sounds a bit like... oh I see.

Back by popular demand or not Howard is a bit pants... at Disney's insistence no doubt. Duck-tailing nicely with the movie then. They're practically two ducks in a pod, or rather, *egg*. Siamese duck anyone? Thought not!

Beverly: (Picks up a handful of feathers) What's this in my bed?

Howard: Ah, souvenirs?

Beverly: I'm gonna miss you a lot, Duckie.